

Seniors to Receive Free Preventive Care, Reduced Prescription Drug Costs

Rosendale, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today met with seniors at the Rosendale Recreation Center to discuss how Medicare coverage will improve as a result the health care reform measure he voted for and President Obama signed into law last week.

"This is a major victory for the over 109,000 Medicare beneficiaries who live in my district," Hinchey said. "Seniors on Medicare will now be able to receive free preventative care, better care for chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, and a gradual elimination of the gap in prescription drug coverage known as the donut hole."

Hinchey outlined seven improvements to the Medicare program that would be most beneficial to Rosendale's seniors, including that health care reform would:

1. Add at least nine years to the solvency of the Medicare trust fund.
2. Fill the Medicare prescription drug donut hole. In 2010, Medicare beneficiaries who fall into the prescription drug coverage gap known as the donut hole will receive a \$250 rebate. After that they will receive a pharmaceutical manufacturers' 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs, increasing to a 75 percent discount on brand-name and generic drugs to close the donut hole by 2020.
3. Provide new, free annual wellness visits, and eliminate out-of-pocket copayments for preventive benefits under Medicare, such as cancer and diabetes screenings.
4. Provide better chronic care, with doctors collaborating to provide patient-centered care for the 80 percent of older Americans who have at least one chronic medical condition like high blood pressure or diabetes.

5. Improve Medicare payments for primary care, which will protect access to these vital services.

6. Reduce overpayments to private Medicare Advantage plans. Medicare currently overpays private plans by an average of 14 percent. This legislation reins in those overpayments to ensure a fair payment system that rewards quality.

7. Encourage reimbursing health care providers on the basis of value, not volume. The bill includes a number of proposals to move away from the "a la carte" Medicare fee-for-service system toward paying for quality and value while reducing costs for America's seniors.

Hinchey also noted that while the bill represents a major step forward, it still does not accomplish everything that is needed to improve the delivery of health care. For instance, the bill lacks a provision that would allow Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for bulk discount deals, which could save taxpayers up to \$156 billion over ten years. To address that and other issues, the congressman will continue working for additional legislation that further improves the quality of Medicare and makes health care more comprehensive, accessible and affordable for all Americans.

On Sunday, March 21, Hinchey voted to pass the most significant piece of health care reform legislation since the creation of Medicare in 1965. He was also present for the president's signing of the bill into law at the White House last Tuesday.